



# New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

## HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE FACT SHEET

Common Name: **SODIUM CYANIDE**

CAS Number: 143-33-9

DOT Number: UN 1689

RTK Substance number: 1693

Date: February 1989 Revision: June 1998

### HAZARD SUMMARY

- \* **Sodium Cyanide** can affect you when breathed in and by passing through your skin.
- \* Contact can irritate and burn the skin and eyes.
- \* Breathing **Sodium Cyanide** can irritate the nose and throat causing coughing and wheezing.
- \* High exposure can cause headache, dizziness, fast heart beat, and even unconsciousness and death.
- \* **Sodium Cyanide** may cause the thyroid gland to enlarge.
- \* Exposure can damage the nervous system and cause changes in the blood cell count.
- \* Repeated lower exposures can cause nose discharge, nosebleeds, and sores in the nose.

### IDENTIFICATION

**Sodium Cyanide** is a white powder (like salt). It is used as a solid or in solution to extract metal ores, in electroplating and metal cleaning baths, in metal hardening, and in insecticides.

### REASON FOR CITATION

- \* **Sodium Cyanide** is on the Hazardous Substance List because it is regulated by OSHA and cited by ACGIH, DOT, NIOSH, DEP, HHAG, NFPA, and EPA.
- \* Definitions are provided on page 5.

### HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOU ARE BEING EXPOSED

The New Jersey Right to Know Act requires most employers to label chemicals in the workplace and requires public employers to provide their employees with information and training concerning chemical hazards and controls. The federal OSHA Hazard Communication Standard, 1910.1200, requires private employers to provide similar training and information to their employees.

- \* Exposure to hazardous substances should be routinely evaluated. This may include collecting personal and area air samples. You can obtain copies of sampling results from your employer. You have a legal right to this information under OSHA 1910.20.

- \* If you think you are experiencing any work-related health problems, see a doctor trained to recognize occupational diseases. Take this Fact Sheet with you.

### WORKPLACE EXPOSURE LIMITS

The following exposure limits are for *Cyanide Salts*, (measured as *Cyanide*):

OSHA: The legal airborne permissible exposure limit (PEL) is **5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** averaged over an 8-hour work-shift.

NIOSH: The recommended airborne exposure limit is **5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** which should not be exceeded during any 10 minute period.

ACGIH: The recommended airborne exposure limit is **5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** which should not be exceeded during any 15-minute period.

- \* The above exposure limits are for air levels only. When skin contact also occurs, you may be overexposed, even though air levels are less than the limits listed above.

### WAYS OF REDUCING EXPOSURE

- \* Where possible, enclose operations and use local exhaust ventilation at the site of chemical release. If local exhaust ventilation or enclosure is not used, respirators should be worn.
- \* Wear protective work clothing.
- \* Wash thoroughly immediately after exposure to **Sodium Cyanide** and at the end of the workshift.
- \* Post hazard and warning information in the work area. In addition, as part of an ongoing education and training effort, communicate all information on the health and safety hazards of **Sodium Cyanide** to potentially exposed workers.

This Fact Sheet is a summary source of information of all potential and most severe health hazards that may result from exposure. Duration of exposure, concentration of the substance and other factors will affect your susceptibility to any of the potential effects described below.

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## HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

### Acute Health Effects

The following acute (short-term) health effects may occur immediately or shortly after exposure to **Sodium Cyanide**:

- \* Contact can irritate and burn the skin and eyes.
- \* Breathing **Sodium Cyanide** can irritate the nose and throat causing coughing and wheezing.
- \* High exposure can cause headache, dizziness, fast heart beat, and even unconsciousness and death.

### Chronic Health Effects

The following chronic (long-term) health effects can occur at some time after exposure to **Sodium Cyanide** and can last for months or years:

### Cancer Hazard

- \* According to the information presently available to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, **Sodium Cyanide** has not been tested for its ability to cause cancer in animals.

### Reproductive Hazard

- \* There is limited evidence that **Sodium Cyanide** is a teratogen in animals. Until further testing has been done, it should be treated as a possible teratogen in humans.

### Other Long-Term Effects

- \* **Sodium Cyanide** may cause the thyroid gland to enlarge and interfere with normal thyroid function.
- \* Exposure can damage the nervous system and cause changes in the blood cell count.
- \* Repeated lower exposures can cause nose discharge, nosebleeds, and sores in the nose.

## MEDICAL

### Medical Testing

Before beginning employment and at regular times after that, the following are recommended:

- \* Urine thiocyanate levels.

If symptoms develop or overexposure is suspected, the following may be useful:

- \* Blood cyanide level.
- \* Complete blood count.

Any evaluation should include a careful history of past and present symptoms with an exam. Medical tests that look for damage already done are not a substitute for controlling exposure.

Request copies of your medical testing. You have a legal right to this information under OSHA 1910.20.

### Mixed Exposures

- \* Since cigarette smoke also contains some *cyanide*, smokers may have somewhat higher blood *cyanide* and urine *thiocyanate* levels.

## WORKPLACE CONTROLS AND PRACTICES

Unless a less toxic chemical can be substituted for a hazardous substance, **ENGINEERING CONTROLS** are the most effective way of reducing exposure. The best protection is to enclose operations and/or provide local exhaust ventilation at the site of chemical release. Isolating operations can also reduce exposure. Using respirators or protective equipment is less effective than the controls mentioned above, but is sometimes necessary.

In evaluating the controls present in your workplace, consider: (1) how hazardous the substance is, (2) how much of the substance is released into the workplace and (3) whether harmful skin or eye contact could occur. Special controls should be in place for highly toxic chemicals or when significant skin, eye, or breathing exposures are possible.

In addition, the following control is recommended:

- \* Where possible, automatically transfer **Sodium Cyanide** from drums or other storage containers to process containers.

Good **WORK PRACTICES** can help to reduce hazardous exposures. The following work practices are recommended:

- \* Workers whose clothing has been contaminated by **Sodium Cyanide** should change into clean clothing promptly.
- \* Do not take contaminated work clothes home. Family members could be exposed.
- \* Eye wash fountains should be provided in the immediate work area for emergency use.
- \* If there is the possibility of skin exposure, emergency shower facilities should be provided.
- \* On skin contact with **Sodium Cyanide**, immediately wash or shower to remove the chemical. At the end of the work-shift, wash any areas of the body that may have contacted **Sodium Cyanide**, whether or not known skin contact has occurred.

- \* Do not eat, smoke, or drink where **Sodium Cyanide** is handled, processed, or stored, since the chemical can be swallowed. Wash hands carefully before eating or smoking.
- \* DO NOT DRY SWEEP for clean-up of solid or powder **Sodium Cyanide**. Use a vacuum or a wet method to reduce dust during clean-up.

## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

WORKPLACE CONTROLS ARE BETTER THAN PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT. However, for some jobs (such as outside work, confined space entry, jobs done only once in a while, or jobs done while workplace controls are being installed), personal protective equipment may be appropriate.

OSHA 1910.132 requires employers to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment for each hazard and to train employees on how and when to use protective equipment.

The following recommendations are only guidelines and may not apply to every situation.

### Clothing

- \* Avoid skin contact with **Sodium Cyanide**. Wear protective gloves and clothing. Safety equipment suppliers/manufacturers can provide recommendations on the most protective glove/clothing material for your operation.
- \* All protective clothing (suits, gloves, footwear, headgear) should be clean, available each day, and put on before work.
- \* Clothes must prevent skin exposure because the vapors of **Sodium Cyanide** are dangerously toxic and can be absorbed through the skin.

### Eye Protection

- \* Wear splash-proof chemical goggles and face shield when working with liquid solutions of **Sodium Cyanide**, unless full facepiece respiratory protection is worn.
- \* Wear dust-proof goggles and face shield when working with powders or dust, unless full facepiece respiratory protection is worn.

### Respiratory Protection

#### IMPROPER USE OF RESPIRATORS IS DANGEROUS.

Such equipment should only be used if the employer has a written program that takes into account workplace conditions, requirements for worker training, respirator fit testing and medical exams, as described in OSHA 1910.134.

- \* Where the potential exists for exposures over **5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, use a MSHA/NIOSH approved supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode. For increased protection use in combination with an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode.
- \* Exposure to **25 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** is immediately dangerous to life and health. If the possibility of exposure above **25 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** exists, use a MSHA/NIOSH approved self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode.

## HANDLING AND STORAGE

- \* Prior to working with **Sodium Cyanide** you should be trained on its proper handling and storage.
- \* **Sodium Cyanide** reacts with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC) to release HIGHLY FLAMMABLE *Hydrogen Cyanide*.
- \* **Sodium Cyanide** is not compatible with OXIDIZING AGENTS (such as PERCHLORATES, PEROXIDES, PERMANGANATES, CHLORATES, NITRATES, CHLORINE, BROMINE and FLUORINE) and ACID SALTS.
- \* Store in tightly closed containers in a cool, well-ventilated area.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Q: If I have acute health effects, will I later get chronic health effects?
- A: Not always. Most chronic (long-term) effects result from repeated exposures to a chemical.
- Q: Can I get long-term effects without ever having short-term effects?
- A: Yes, because long-term effects can occur from repeated exposures to a chemical at levels not high enough to make you immediately sick.
- Q: What are my chances of getting sick when I have been exposed to chemicals?
- A: The likelihood of becoming sick from chemicals is increased as the amount of exposure increases. This is determined by the length of time and the amount of material to which someone is exposed.

- Q: Is the risk of getting sick higher for workers than for community residents?
- A: Yes. Exposures in the community, except possibly in cases of fires or spills, are usually much lower than those found in the workplace. However, people in the community may be exposed to contaminated water as well as to chemicals in the air over long periods. Because of this, and because of exposure of children or people who are already ill, community exposures may cause health problems.
- Q: Who is at the greatest risk from reproductive hazards?
- A: Pregnant women are at greatest risk from chemicals that harm the developing fetus. However, chemicals may affect the ability to have children, so both men and women of childbearing age are at high risk.
- Q: Should I be concerned if a chemical is a teratogen in animals?
- A: Yes. Although some chemicals may affect humans differently than they affect animals, damage to animals suggests that similar damage can occur in humans.

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The following information is available from:

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services  
Occupational Disease and Injury Services  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360  
(609) 984-1863

#### **Industrial Hygiene Information**

Industrial hygienists are available to answer your questions regarding the control of chemical exposures using exhaust ventilation, special work practices, good housekeeping, good hygiene practices, and personal protective equipment including respirators. In addition, they can help to interpret the results of industrial hygiene survey data.

#### **Medical Evaluation**

If you think you are becoming sick because of exposure to chemicals at your workplace, you may call a Department of Health and Senior Services physician who can help you find the services you need.

#### **Public Presentations**

Presentations and educational programs on occupational health or the Right to Know Act can be organized for labor unions, trade associations and other groups.

#### **Right to Know Information Resources**

The Right to Know Infoline (609) 984-2202 can answer questions about the identity and potential health effects of chemicals, list of educational materials in occupational health, references used to prepare the Fact Sheets, preparation of the Right to Know survey, education and training programs, labeling requirements, and general information regarding the Right to Know Act. Violations of the law should be reported to (609) 984-2202.

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## DEFINITIONS

**ACGIH** is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. It recommends upper limits (called TLVs) for exposure to workplace chemicals.

A **carcinogen** is a substance that causes cancer.

The **CAS number** is assigned by the Chemical Abstracts Service to identify a specific chemical.

A **combustible** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that will burn.

A **corrosive** substance is a gas, liquid or solid that causes irreversible damage to human tissue or containers.

**DEP** is the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

**DOT** is the Department of Transportation, the federal agency that regulates the transportation of chemicals.

**EPA** is the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency responsible for regulating environmental hazards.

A **fetus** is an unborn human or animal.

A **flammable** substance is a solid, liquid, vapor or gas that will ignite easily and burn rapidly.

The **flash point** is the temperature at which a liquid or solid gives off vapor that can form a flammable mixture with air.

**HHAG** is the Human Health Assessment Group of the federal EPA.

**IARC** is the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a scientific group that classifies chemicals according to their cancer-causing potential.

A **miscible** substance is a liquid or gas that will evenly dissolve in another.

**mg/m<sup>3</sup>** means milligrams of a chemical in a cubic meter of air. It is a measure of concentration (weight/volume).

**MSHA** is the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the federal agency that regulates mining. It also evaluates and approves respirators.

A **mutagen** is a substance that causes mutations. A **mutation** is a change in the genetic material in a body cell. Mutations can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, or cancer.

**NAERG** is the North American Emergency Response Guidebook. It was jointly developed by Transport Canada, the United States Department of Transportation and the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation of Mexico. It is a guide for first responders to quickly identify the specific or generic hazards of material involved in a transportation incident, and to protect themselves and the general public during the initial response phase of the incident.

**NCI** is the National Cancer Institute, a federal agency that determines the cancer-causing potential of chemicals.

**NFPA** is the National Fire Protection Association. It classifies substances according to their fire and explosion hazard.

**NIOSH** is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It tests equipment, evaluates and approves respirators, conducts studies of workplace hazards, and proposes standards to OSHA.

**NTP** is the National Toxicology Program which tests chemicals and reviews evidence for cancer.

**OSHA** is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards.

**PEOSHA** is the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act, a state law which sets PELs for New Jersey public employees.

**ppm** means parts of a substance per million parts of air. It is a measure of concentration by volume in air.

A **reactive** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that releases energy under certain conditions.

A **teratogen** is a substance that causes birth defects by damaging the fetus.

**TLV** is the Threshold Limit Value, the workplace exposure limit recommended by ACGIH.

The **vapor pressure** is a measure of how readily a liquid or a solid mixes with air at its surface. A higher vapor pressure indicates a higher concentration of the substance in air and therefore increases the likelihood of breathing it in.

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(609) 984-2202